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HENRY CLAY MILLER

Collector and Author of

The State Coinage of Connecticut

Born May 19, 1844; Died February 6, 1920



EDWARD R. BARNSLEY

The State Coinage of Connecticut, because of its depth of scholarship and the extensive scope of its field, is without doubt the most important detailed study ever made of any particular series of Early American coinage. Although this standard reference work is so very well known to numismatists, only a few facts are preserved concerning the career of its distinguished author, Henry Clay Miller, Esq., who was truly a Collector of the Old School. In the Williams College Alumni Review, there appeared this brief biographical sketch written by one of Miller's classmates, J. Howell Jones, (Williams, 1868):

"Henry C. Miller was born in Philadelphia, May 19, 1844, the son of George H. and Emma M. Miller. He was prepared for college by Samuel M. Cleveland (Williams 1858). He entered the class of 1868 in its freshman year and, after remaining in college the first two terms, he returned to Philadelphia and prepared himself for admission to the class of 1867, which he entered in junior year after passing a brilliant examination. He stood high in scholarship and at graduation was awarded the aesthetic oration. Mr. Miller was a member of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity. He was unmarried and is survived by a sister. Mr. Miller became an authority on the early coinages of Connecticut, Vermont, and Massachusetts. A book written by him on this subject is now being published by the American Numismatic Society."

A second account, written by "Mr. Wade, associated with Mr. Miller in school work," furnishes some details concerning his friend's business interests and teaching experiences:

"The death of Henry C. Miller on February 5 [Sic] , 1920, recalls the intense personality of a man who, a number of years ago, exerted a marvelous influence on a growing generation in matters educational. Mr. Miller was born in Philadelphia, and was a graduate of Williams College of the class of 1867, in which were his intimates, the late Hamilton Mabie and Francis Lynde Stetson. After a few years of interesting research in the mining fields of the Rockies, he devoted himself to education, teaching first in the Trenton Normal School and in 1876 was principal of the Hasbrouck Institute in Jersey City. The phenomenal growth of that institution was due not only to Mr. Miller's careful financial management but particularly to a certain faculty he possessed of interesting boys both from his experience in the West, the life he put into the facts of history, and his inventiveness in varying the dull routine of formal study. Mr. Miller in 1881 sold his interest in the Hasbrouck Institute and became the principal of the Dwight School in New York where he had as patrons some of the most prominent families. Many of Mr. Miller's pupils will recall the sincerity of his character, and the interest he always inspired in the subjects he taught. Mr. Miller left the profession of teaching nearly twenty-five years ago and became an operator in the financial markets where he amassed a fortune. His versatility showed itself in successful financial operations, in literature, history, and especially in his avocation - numismatics. He was a member of the English and American Numismatic Societies."

From other references in The Numismatist, it is learned that Henry C. Miller was associated, at the time of his death, with the firm of Goodbody & Co., New York City stock brokers "with which he had been connected for a number of years." His known numismatic affiliations were The Royal Numismatic Society, American Numismatic Society, New York Numismatic Club, and American Numismatic Association of which he had been a member since 1902. His death was reported in the March 1920 issue of The Numismatist, p. 118, as having occurred "on February 6 of heart trouble, following influenza, with which he was attacked on January 30. His death occurred at the hospital, to which he was removed on February 1."

The Grim Reaper thus denied Miller the pleasure of seeing his labor of love appear in print, for it was not until seven months later that his finished work came off the press. On page 62 of The State Coinage of Connecticut, the publishers had thoughtfully inserted this note:

"It seems fitting that the foregoing should not be published without an expression of loss which numismatists feel at the untimely death of the author, Mr. Henry Clay Miller, on February 6th, 1920. The preparation of the material was a great pleasure to Mr. Miller. The completed work shows the painstaking and systematic manner in which the task was done. The final manuscript revision was finished but a short time before Mr. Miller's sudden death. Some slight errors have possibly occurred in the printed pages through not having had the benefit of the Author's proof reading."

Public announcement of Miller's publication was made in the September 1920 issue of The Numismatist, p. 407, as follows:

"Part I of Volume LIII (1919) of the American Journal of Numismatics, the annual of the American Numismatic Society, New York City, has just been issued. Part I is devoted to descriptive lists of the colonial copper coins of Connecticut, Vermont, and Massachusetts. The late Henry C. Miller of New York City is the author of The State Coinage of Connecticut, a very exhaustive description of the many die varieties of the Connecticut cents. It was generally known among collectors that for some years Mr. Miller had been preparing such a list, and upon his death last winter it was thought that possibly his work had not been completed. But a note by the Publication Committee, which is composed of John Reilly, Jr., Samuel P. Avery, William B. Osgood Field and Howland Wood states that a final revision of the manuscript was made by Mr. Miller only a short time before his death. The list describes minutely all the known varieties of these coins, and is accompanied by five full-page plates showing many obverses and reverses . . . The price of Part I is \$3."

No account of Miller's life would be complete without some mention of the dispersal sale of his collection, for his was the only great collection of Connecticut's that was ever sold complete at public auction. The Dr. Thomas Hall collection is reported to have been sold to Carl Wurtzbach, who in turn sold it intact to Virgil M. Brand, the super-collector, coin investor and Chicago brewer, who left at his death a tremendous general collection valued at two million dollars.

Although it was unfortunate that Miller did not live to see his monumental research on Connecticut Coppers published, it was, on the other hand, a blessing that he did not know that his lifetime collection of world coinage would be dissipated and scattered at large in the third month after his burial. But, of course, it was really his own fault that a wealthy man, aged 76, had not made better arrangements for that eventuality. As early as April 22, 1920, only eleven weeks after Miller's death, Thomas L. Elder wrote the preface to his auction catalogue for "The Splendid Rare Coin Collection of the Late Henry C. Miller, Esqr., of New York City." In it, Elder grouped the collection into 2212 lots, and boasted about how and why he had been selected to conduct this great sale, in these words:

"Feeling no doubt that his end might come at an unexpected moment he had for the past half dozen years gradually offered the various series in which he was interested, selling them all through myself in my sales. I always regarded it as an especially high compliment that I retained from a first acquaintance with Mr. Miller, some fifteen years ago, his fullest confidence. So that it was no great surprise to learn that shortly before his death he had told his sister, Miss Miller, that if anything happened to him to take his collection at once to me for disposal at auction sale. The notations he left on some of his coin envelopes showed that as early as the '70's he had purchased some of the coins offered in this very sale."

The provenance of several Connecticut lots are given as ex-Proskey collection, Cleneay sale, or Louis G. Parmelee collection sold June 25-27, 1890.

Miller's maiden sister and only heir evidently had little or no interest in her brother's famous collection, other than that of fulfilling her legal duties of executrix by liquidating his personal property. What she did was disastrous to his Connecticut series, which represented, however, only a very small fraction of his entire collection. The Roman series, for example, contained over a thousand catalog lots. The Elder Coin and Curio Company, 21 W. 35th Street, New York City, badly described, graded and attributed his Connecticuts, then lumped them together at the very end of a tiresome four-day long sale. No one knows exactly how many pieces comprised Miller's collection at its peak, for Elder suggests that perhaps some of them might have been "gradually offered" after 1914. In any event, the 797 residual Connecticuts in the Miller estate were sold on May 29, 1920, in 382 auction lots for the trivial sum of only \$585.65. This was an unbelievable average of about 73¢ per copper! If the sale had only been postponed until after publication of the ANS Journal, collectors would then have had an opportunity to check attributions and rarity ratings to a standard reference, and consequently, the prices realized would undoubtedly have been greater.

According to the rules prevalent at that time, auctioneer Daniel R. Kennedy accepted any bid up to 50¢, then by 5¢ advances to \$2.50, then by 10¢ advances to \$10.00. However, there were only three lots struck off that were over \$10.00. The highest bid on any Connecticut in this sale was \$14.50 for Lot No. 1838. This was the unique 1786, 5.3-B.2, the obverse of which was fortunately plated by Elder, because its present whereabouts is unknown. Both sides of the same coin were later shown on Plate II of the ANS Journal. Lot No. 1972 brought the second highest price, \$14.00. It was a Fine specimen of the exceedingly rare 33.18-Z.24 of which only two examples are presently known.

The Miller sale differed in other respects from present day coin auctions. For example, unillustrated catalogs were distributed free and bidding was by the piece, with the buyer required to take all the pieces in a multiple-piece lot. No such lot could be separated on a piece bid basis. The lowest piece bid in the Connecticut series was 3 1/2¢ for a lot of 44 "poor and fair duplicates," which cost the buyer only \$1.54 for the entire packet of coins. Two particular coins can be used to illustrate the extremely low prices that Miller's Connecticut brought at the crash sale of his estate in 1920, as compared to the inflated figures they brought forty-eight years later when they were sold again at the New Netherlands auction on December 3, 1968. A 1787, 33.36-T.2 which sold for 70¢ in 1920 brought \$15.00 in 1968. And a 1787, 53-FF which sold for \$1.10 in 1920, also brought \$15.00 in 1968.



LETTERS and TECHNICAL NOTES

► In this issue, we are presenting additional extracts from Robert J. Lindesmith's letters on the subject of the "New Haven Restrikes," H. N. Rust and C. I. Bushnell. Bob takes issue with ye editor's proposition that C. I. Bushnell may have been the victim of a fraud, as suggested in my comments on the "New Haven Restrikes" in the last issue, and presents some convincing arguments against this possibility. As the reader goes through these ideas, it must be kept in mind that these are only "pieces of the puzzle" and that the puzzle remains to be assembled.

Eric P. Newman commented in a letter regarding the last issue, "The various points of view on the Fugio problems are most enlightening and show what can be done with teamwork--wouldn't it be wonderful if all of those who have done research on the Fugios could now get together and have a seminar to discuss the facts and their theories so that sound conclusions could be reached." Regarding H. N. Rust, Eric continued, "Someone should forthwith look him up in the Chicago directories, biographical publications, and other sources." And to make our collection of "pieces of the puzzle" more extensive, in a telephone conversation with Mr. Don Taxay, Don mentioned that during some recent research on Indian Peace Medals, he had come across a reference to an individual, apparently an archeologist and a very young man at the time - named Horatio N. Rust.

JCS

●●from Robert J. Lindesmith

PIECES OF THE PUZZLE

(TN-12)

Your reference to a hub raised from the genuine Fugio Obverse No. 5 die supplies a rather logical reason for my difficulty in piecing together a story of the New Haven restrikes, as based on the Taxay article that satisfied all the questions raised in my mind. As I have strong reasons to believe that you are wrong in your belief that Bushnell was "taken," I will make an effort to cover my reasons and to explain why I consider your reference to the Obverse 5 die so important.

In my research on the token and medal field, I have noted numerous references to the so-called "Bushnell Story," but unfortunately I have failed to locate any publication of the "Inside Story." And while I have reasons to believe that it concerns Hard Times Tokens, Low 24, 25, 26, 27, 41, 42, and 43, there is a chance that it may also include the so-called Fugio fabrications, 101-AA, 101-BB, 101-EE and 103-EE.

Under Low 50, Lyman H. Low makes the following comment:

"This piece was first introduced to the public by the late Charles I. Bushnell in his work (referred to in the introduction), published in 1858. It next appeared in his collection of coins, which was dispersed by auction in 1881. I purchased the piece for a collector who still retains it; no other is known to me, and I have no hesitancy in stating that my conclusions are that it is unique and was struck from dies made by Bushnell's order. I hold a similar unfavorable opinion of Nos. 24, 25, 26, 27, 41, 42 and 43, but in these latter I think a partner was admitted and a very limited number of each was struck, but probably only single specimens in silver."

In this case, I'm quite sure that Low is wrong as there are a good number of reasons why it is doubtful that Low 50 belongs to the Bushnell group. The important point is that this reference as well as several other somewhat misleading references indicate the probability that the Scovill die-sinker may have used old dies in some manner to create the dies used in the striking of Low 24, 25, 26, etc.

With the above in mind, there is the interesting possibility that the three dies sold by H. N. Rust to a New York dealer were acquired by Bushnell. 102 and GG could represent two of the dies. Thus the Scovill firm struck the New Haven restrikes from dies that were created from the originals sent by H. N. Rust. 101-AA represents the dies created for Bushnell from the dies sold to the New York dealer. This would explain the reason for the 103 die and the 101-EE and 103-EE combinations, etc.

The "Maiden Lane" address of the "Scovill Manufacturing Company's outlet in New York City in the 1850's; Bushnell's friendship with Charles Cushing Wright who had a studio on "Maiden Lane;" the fact that Wright had cut a number of earlier dies for the Scovills; the Washington dies cut by Wright for Bushnell; Bushnell's interest in store cards and medals and Bushnell's occupation (lawyer) would suggest that Bushnell was on good terms with the Scovill firm of Waterbury at that time.

While I'm not certain that there is any connection, one set of the Bushnell dies--Washington (cut by Wright)--were altered at a later date in Philadelphia and were used in the striking of medals for the Messrs. Chapman on the occasion of the Centennial of Washington's inauguration in 1889 (No. 52, The Numismatist, LXII, 1949, p. 404). The same concern that altered these dies (I believe) also altered and restruck several other Wright and Bale dies. They also struck a few impressions on gold planchets in

some cases (two or three impressions). For this reason I am led to believe that the gold impressions of 101-AA and 103-EE were struck in Philadelphia. With the exception of medals, I have not noted any reference to gold varieties struck in any other location outside of Philadelphia. Just as an added illustration, it is interesting to note that the Scovill firm struck silver and copper specimens of the New Haven Restrikes and that the gold specimens were struck in Philadelphia.

Don Taxay's coverage of C. Wyllys Betts in Counterfeit Mis-Struck and Unofficial U.S. Coins (pages 139 to 147) will explain why there is a natural question mark as to just what Fugio dies (if any) were discovered by Betts, although it is possible that the discovery of the dies was responsible for his interest in the subject.

On the basis of Taxay's article in Coins on The Fugio Cents, the failure to locate original dies does raise an interesting question as to just what happened to the original dies discovered by Betts. As there is chance that the original dies were destroyed by natural causes, such as the Chicago fire (1871) and the Scovill fire, it would appear that the restrikes of 102-GG could represent an important key to the true story.

If we consider the importance of the Fugio subject in relation to American numismatics, I would be inclined to believe that Betts did discover the dies as reported in the 1873 issue of the American Journal of Numismatics. If the story of the original dies was a fabrication created to serve as a foundation for the so-called Fugio restrikes, it is my impression that some collector or dealer would have exposed the true story a long time ago. The very questionable nature of the creations could serve as the major reason why dealers would shy away from this subject.

In the March 1867 issue of the American Journal of Numismatics, A. B. Sage makes the following statement:

"About the year 1858, I first met Mr. Charles Bushnell, a gentleman who had probably done as much as any other in the country to advance the interest of Numismatology."

This in addition to a study of his 1858 reference on U.S. tokens and medals as well as many other references to Bushnell has convinced me that it is highly improbable that Bushnell would be taken in by the numerous varieties of the Fugio fabrications.

John Adams Bolen makes the following comments in regards to his copies (Pure!!) of Colonial coins:

"I spent a great deal of time on them; on one I worked from a genuine coin, on the others from very fine electrotypes. They are all quite scarce now. They were not a financial success to me."

With the cost factor in mind and it must have been high in the case of the Fugio fabrications, we can be rather certain that whoever went to the trouble of having the restrikes made ended up with very little profit, if any.

Another reason I find the subject of the New Haven restrikes so fascinating concerns the many early references to original dies being destroyed to prevent future restriking which had become a rather sensitive subject in the 1870's and 1880's. In this case, the Scovill firm could have returned the original dies and the 104-FF dies to Rust and still remained in position to strike working dies from the hubs.

Thus on a rather precarious basis, as we lack any detailed information on Rust in respect to his occupation; how he acquired the dies; his collecting interests and what happened to his collection if formed one could speculate on the basis of the Betts story that 104-FF represents the impressions created from the two original dies sent to Waterbury by Rust. Possibly the DD impression from an incomplete hub represents the third die which was discarded by the Scovill die-sinker in his efforts to supply Rust with restrikes of an original Fugio. This would explain Rust's selling the three pattern dies to the New York dealer which are represented by 101, EE and AA (BB represents an off-spring).

As it is doubtful that the Scovill firm struck the gold specimens, there would be reason to believe that the 101, EE, etc., as well as the original dies were returned to New York.

My failure to find any evidence that the Scovill firm struck gold specimens would suggest that the dies at a later date found their way from New York City to Philadelphia. This would explain the apparent lack of gold specimens in the Bushnell collection (?).

I could go on and on as to why I consider it important to cover this subject in detail. In any event, I have tried to at least give you an idea of why I disagree with your statement in respect to Bushnell--that he may have been "taken" by a fraud.

MORE LETTERS ●●from Walter Breen
An appeal for assistance (TN-13)

I am fast approaching printer stage on a manuscript on Massachusetts silver which will supersede the Crosby and Noe writings. "We all stand on dead men's shoulders," says Alfred C. Korzybski, and this effort is no exception; what it does offer is a corrected sequence using all techniques now available, with descriptions of all varieties and die alterations known to date. This means, for instance, 23 distinguishable Oak Tree XII's rather than Noe's 14, 9 different Oak Tree III's, 9 different Oak Tree II's, 17 different Large Pine Tree XII's excluding Noe 12 which is a "Small" and Noe 31 which is a forgery; the above comprising only intentional die alterations and not such things as clashed or broken dies. As I have a publisher for this work, we need not fear any such ghastly contretemps as killed the half cent and New Jersey mss.

What I need is access to important collections for examination and photography of anything I don't already have on record. A few pieces examined long ago have slipped away again and there are no photos:

- (1) Large Pine Tree XII Crosby 2bA2 ex. Parmelee 330 and a Stack sale of about 1958, not in Noe but an altered version of N-11 now with redrawn tree and colons added to rev. legends
- (2) Oak Tree XII N-3 former Magriel, Kagin? coin
- (3) The later die state of Oak Tree XII N-12, tree again weak
- (4) Oak Tree II intermed. between N-29 and 30, former Werner piece

There are also a few pieces known to exist but which have eluded me in all these years:

- (1) Crosby 3bE. Willow Tree XII, legend blundered through double striking as MASSATVSETSS IN / NEI EWEN GLD. ANDOM (probably a Noe 3-D as it also has the large heavy rev. letters and numerals)
- (2) Lot 849 Crosby sale, legend given as ASAATHHVSET IN / NEWVENG ND H DOON with 5 in date indistinct
- (3) Willow Tree VI ex. Crosby 850
- (4) Willow Tree III ex. Bushnell, Parmelee

Illustrations will also be provided of the old (not the very recent) struck copies and forgeries of Massachusetts silver, putting into a single place those previously published by Noe and Newman and those more recently discovered.

EDITORS NOTE: Those who wish to assist Walter in this venture may contact him through CNL. JCS